

A Crow at Midnight

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><p>"She would've called, you know."</p>

Jaune sat bolt upright in bed. A strange, rough voice had rudely awakened him, and now a grey figure loomed in his window. He shakily pointed his finger at the intruder and demanded, "Wh-what are you d-doing in my room? Who are you?"

It was dark, but he could tell the stranger was smiling. "Don't worry, kid, I'm an old friend of Ozpin's," he drawled.

Jaune fumbled for the switch on his lamp. After knocking nearly every item — books, an alarm clock, an empty water glass — off his bedside table, he finally turned on the small, warm light. He studied the man standing across the room from him and, scrunching his brow, said, "I saw you hanging around the Beacon dorms and the coliseum during the Vytal Festival!"

"I'm also Ruby and Yang's uncle."

"Oh."

They sat in awkward silence for a moment before Jaune nervously cleared his throat. "Uh, who would've called me? And since the CCT's down, no one can call, so..."

"Ruby wanted to call you," Qrow grunted. "Instead, she had to go with

snail mail. Another family friend is coming by this corner of the continent next week and promised to deliver a letter to you."

Jaune looked confused. "Then why did you break into my house? Couldn't you just tell me what the letter says?"

Qrow frowned at the drowsy blonde. "It's Ruby's message, so I'm not gonna have an old drunk like me trying to explain it to you. I just want toâ€ Well, I've never given advice. So I'll tell you a story.

"Once upon a time â€ clichÃ©, I know â€ there were four kids: a girl so shy she couldn't look at her own reflection, a skirt-chasing jock, a rebellious punk chick, and her deadbeat brother. Well, this old prick thought it'd be funny if these four horribly incompatible people were forced to work together as a team. After a few weeks of trying to kill each other, they decided that they didn't hate each other and actually started to get along.

"Eventually, the jock and the punk chick decided they really liked each other. They spent more and more time with each other until they fell in love and got married. The shy girl and the deadbeat spent more time together, too, but they were content with the joy of their friends, and I realize how sappy that sounds. Soon, the happy couple had a kid: a little girl with golden hair and a fiery soul.

"But one day, the punk chick walked out on her little family. Maybe being a mother was too boring for her. Maybe she actually had a good reason. Hell if I know. She hasn't told me.

"Anyways, she left, and everyone she left behind started hurting in their own way. The jock locked up and went numb. The shy girl stayed shy, but she drew her team, her family, closer to herself. Meanwhile, the chick's brother, the deadbeat, turned in on himself and shut everyone out. His own twin sister had abandoned him; he felt like all his trust had been betrayed. After all, the person he cared most about had basically given him the finger and disappeared. He began to take comfort only in the warm embrace of whiskey.

"The shy girl tried to get the deadbeat to come around, but he told her to buzz off. He didn't care anymore.

"Well, she wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. She poured every bottle of booze he had into the gutter, half-drowned him in a bowl of ice water until he sobered up, and told him that he was more of a selfish jackass than his sister had been. He had abandoned his brother and his niece when they needed him most. Frankly, she thought the punk chick was kinder than he was because she wasn't hanging around, refusing to take responsibility.

"Brutal honesty. That's something else Ruby got from her mom."

Qrow paused his story to take a drink from his flask, giving Jaune time to process what he'd just heard. _How is he so familiar with the people in his story? Unlessâ€| _he frowned as he realized what that must mean. "Wait a minuteâ€| The story's about you and your team, isn't it?"

Qrow lowered the flask to his lap and smirked at the blonde. The older man's expression oozed almost arrogant confidence, but his

eyes, Jaune thought, betrayed a little sadness. "You're sharp, kid."

"You're the deadbeat. So it was your sister who ran away," Jaune added.

"Yep." Qrow replied, popping the p._

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Qrow grunted as he pocketed his flask. "Being sorry about someone else's old problems gets you a whole lot of nowhere. You've got enough to deal with right now."

"Anywaysâ€| where was I? Anyways, the shy girl â€" her name was Summer â€" got me to shape up. I tried to be a decent brother to Taiyang, the jock, and a good uncle to my new niece, Yang. Well, as I got my life together, so did Tai, and he and Summer fell in love. They had a kid together and called her Ruby."

Jaune couldn't help but catch his breath a little as he heard his friend's name mentioned. Qrow ignored him and went on: "One day, that old prick Ozpin who had put the team together in the first place sent Summer out on a special mission. She never came back. Fortunately, Ruby didn't really remember her mom. Unfortunately, Yang remembered both her moms and was devastated. Tai shut down again too. He started taking mission after mission, trying to drown out his sorrows in work instead of drink. Meanwhile, I got to be the responsible adult for my nieces while their dad got it together.

"Tai finally made his peace with the situation and started acting like the father his little girls needed him to be. And so I went back to the only place I found comfort: the bottom of a shot glass. Summer's death hadn't hit me until I stopped trying to plug all the leaks it had caused; then it was like a freight train. Maybe it's 'cuz I was kinda in love with her, too. Eventually, I stopped drinking to hide the pain and started drinking for the sake of drinking. And here I am."

Jaune uncomfortably glanced about the room as Qrow took another swig from his flask. When the older man didn't continue his story, Jaune stared at him expectantly and asked, "Are you gonna keep going? Telling the story, I mean."

Qrow gave the blonde student a quizzical look. "No, that was the end. What, do you want me to spill even more of my guts out to ya?"

"N-no! I mean, you just endedâ€| abruptly," Jaune replied nervously. "Is there at least a lesson to the story?"

"Yeah," Qrow smirked as he moved back toward the window. "Don't get so caught up in your misery that you don't help people when they need you. I found that out the hard way. Thank Oum I got it right the second time. Losing both of them won't stop hurting anytime soon, but that's a piss-poor excuse to sit around and mope."

"I met Pyrrha once, nice kid. Smart too. Pretty sure she was head-over-heels for you. And that look on your face says you felt likewise. But she wouldn't want you throwing a pity party when the

world's going to hell."

A second after he finished speaking, Qrow disappeared through the window. Jaune jumped up and raced over to look outside for his brief visitor, only to see nothing out in the dark.

It's very hard to see a crow at midnight, after all.

End
file.